Who are stakeholders and what is their role?

* Stakeholders are individuals and groups that have a direct interest (or vested interest) in the program being evaluated
* Since these individuals/groups may also hold a stake in the future incarnations of the program it is imperative that they have a voice in the evaluation process.
* Therefore stakeholders need to:
  + Identify concerns and issues that should be addressed in evaluation; and
  + Assist in selecting the criteria that will be used in evaluating program

What are some of the practical issues of evaluation?

* There still is little agreement whether the intent of evaluation is to render a value judgment or provide information for decision making
* Evaluators are influenced by their past experiences – basis for biases
* Difference in how the evaluator views their role; how they view their role affects how they evaluate (e.g. – choices they make)
* Still disagreement on who should do an evaluation (internal or external) and what the expertise of that person should be.
* There is a variation in the view of ‘what tools’ and evaluator should have in their ‘toolbox’

What are the 5 categories used to classify the different approaches to evaluation?

1. *Objectives-oriented –* determines the extent to which the goals and objective of a program have been met;
2. *Management-oriented –* garnering the required information to meet the needs of the decision-makers;
3. *Consumer-oriented –* means by which to garner consumer information on products and services;
4. *Expertise-oriented –* use of professional expertise to gain information and judge whatever it is being evaluated; and
5. *Participant-oriented –* Stakeholders are part of the entire evaluation process, and their input is required to ascertain values, data criteria, needs values and conclusion.

What are some of the approaches found within the ‘objectives-oriented’ approach?

* Tylerian Evaluation Approach- Developed in the 1930’s
* Means by which to determine “the extent to which the objective of a program” (are being met (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004, p. 72)
* Developed the following 7 steps in which to do evaluation:
  1. Establish broad goals/objectives
  2. Classify goals/objectives
  3. Define objects in behavioral terms
  4. Find situations in which it can be shown that objectives have meet achieved
  5. Develop/select measurement techniques
  6. Collect performance data
  7. Compare data with stated objectives
* Where discrepancies were discovered they would be corrected and evaluation cycle would be repeated
* Important to define goals so that appropriate measurement tools can be selected
* Sanders and Cummingham suggested that goals need to be measured through both logical and empirical methods
* Metfessel and Michael’s Evaluation Paradigm – based on Tylerian model,
  + Expanded the Tylerian model by expanding the vision of alternate instruments that could be used to collect data
* Provus’s Discrepancy Evaluation Model
  + Akin to a management-orientated approach, the key characteristics based on Tylerian approach
  + Evaluation is a process of:
    - Agreeing on standards
    - Determine if there is discrepancy between performance and standards
    - from discrepancy decide whether to improve, continue or cancel some or all of the program
  + focus is to help managers determine degree in which program development is meeting or proceeding toward stated objectives – assuring effective program development

So how has the objectives-based evaluation approach been used in the real world?

* This evaluation approach has been central to notion of evaluation
* This approach has been central in the educational realm in the US since its inception in the 30’s
* Used as a basis of many management techniques that were not evaluative – Mgmt by Objectives (MBO), Planning, Programming, and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), outcomes monitoring, and others.

What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

* Great strength lies in its simplicity
* Several processes have been developed, and many advancements in the measurement of outcomes
* Easier to use for the novice evaluator
* The major concern of this mode of evaluation is that it can lead to what the authors note as tunnel vision
* Goals are prescribed

How does Scriven’s “goal-free” evaluation propose to counter the weaknesses of objective oriented evaluation?

* Goals, in and of themselves, should be evaluated
* Seen by Scriven as a means to ‘reduce bias and increase objectivity’ (p. 86)
* Focus is on actual outcomes as opposed to intended outcomes
* One very important that speaks to increased objectivity is not having the ‘predetermined’ goals cloud the judgement and narrow the breadth of focus of the evaluation
* The 2 approaches can co-exist

I would like to share with you my brush with evaluation this week. I believe a good place to frame this discussion is starting out with Reinke’s (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004) comment in the text: “Evaluators need to identify stakeholders for an evaluation, and involve them early, actively and continuously.”(p. 54). This quote has resonated with me; not just in terms of inclusion stakeholders early in the process, but the notion that evaluation should be included early in the program planning process.

***The context*** –This week I was engaged in a meeting with fellow Senior Academic Officers from the other Regional Colleges within the province. We were finalizing a Strategy framework draft document in which we are developing a collaborative provincial initiative. One of the key objectives set out in the document was the implementation of an effective needs assessment process to prioritize system wide programs and services. Under the strategies to meet this objective, evaluation was listed as the forth strategy. So how is it that in a 15 page document that speaks to a province wide framework that evaluation only warrants one bullet! I must admit if I had been doing this review prior to the start of this class, I would not have given it a second thought.

***The issue*** – For me it became blatantly obvious that we, as senior administrators and decision-makers, did not given the notion of evaluation any place of real value in our document. Upon review of the key objective of needs assessment, and the one bullet dedicated to development of an evaluation process, I sat back and said ‘whoa’! The question that immediately came to mind, and one that I posed to the group, was that our process needs to have a clearer evaluation process built in to it...and, if I am correct (which I am not sure, so am looking for feedback), is whether the development of evaluation mechanisms should become a key objective; one that is informed by the information garnered through ongoing needs assessments. In terms of such a document, is needs assessment a process in and of itself, or is it a process that is but one component of evaluation...one that informs. Important in the discussion of needs assessment and evaluation is the inclusion of stakeholders in the process, and for me, given what I have learned thus far, is that stakeholders need to be involved in all parts in the process...not just during little snippets of time.

***What happened*** – Given the fact that I am not want to keep my thoughts to myself I asked the group the questions that I noted above; and while I believe I presented my argument fairly articulately, given my limited understanding and knowledge about evaluations, the group was hesitant to move away from the changing the objective away from needs assessment. In my defense (in terms of my debating skills!), there was widespread agreement among the group that evaluation is not, by any means, a central component of what we do in terms of program planning at the Regional College. It is often slid in as an after though instead of including it early in the programming process. So while there was agreement about the necessity to include evaluation in this, and any process we do, the common feeling was that we would be far more likely to engender government funding if we spoke to the notion of Needs Assessment rather than evaluation. So my question for the group...is evaluation, even though an important part of the programming process, one that is not supported within our organizations, and by the government? So this is the basis of my quandary or my disconnect if you will; I am therefore using this reflective piece to gain insight from some of you. ***HELP!!***